

NAKED THOUGHTS

ON

SOME OF THE PECULIARITIES

OF THE

FIELD-PREACHING CLERGY.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

By a MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

He that rebuketh a man, AFTERWARDS shall find more
favour than he that flattereth with the tongue. SOLOMON

—*Securus famæ, Liber, ire memento ;*
Nec tibi sit lecto displicuisse pudor.

OVID.

'Tis better sure when blind, deceiv'd to be,
Than be deluded when a man can see.

POPE.

L O N D O N

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FIELD-PREACHING CLERGY

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

BY A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

THE AUTHOR'S NAME, AT THE WARD'S GALLERY, IN
SOLING

OF THE

POPULAR

L O N D O N

Printed for J. Johnson, No. 100, Fleet Street.

THE END OF THE WORLD

NAKED THOUGHTS

ON

SOME OF THE PECULARITIES

OF THE

FIELD-PREACHING CLERGY.

DEAR SIR,

AS you desire me to transmit to you some account of those episcopal clergymen, commonly distinguished by the title of Field Preachers, or Methodist Parsons; I think it an honor to acquaint you with any thing within the compass of my observation; therefore most readily take up my pen, to comply with your request.

Whether they, or the regular clergy are in the right, relative to some particular points of doctrine, is beside my present purpose to investigate: for to enter upon a plan of that kind, were to compile a body of divinity. Being indulged with leave to wave such a field of controversy, our correspondence shall turn on their manner of proceeding:

ceeding : this will prove a sufficient medium through which we shall be able to peep into their *arcana* or merits of their cause ; and I hope be satisfied before we finish, that every thing that glitters is not gold.

In their manner of preaching there are four grand peculiarities. 1. That of pommelling the Bible. 2. Banging the pulpit-cushion (when they preach within doors). 3. Using a deal of vociferation and rodomontade in their sermons, as if their hearers had but one ear apiece : and 4. Railing most unmercifully against the regular clergy. There is scarce a composition of theirs without a vast quantity of these four ingredients. Taking these in their due order, let us endeavour to make the most instructive and religious improvement on them we possibly can.

1 Pommelling the Bible, one would willingly suppose, they design as an emblem of their being able ministers of the New Testament ; so able, that the "*letter which killeth*," as St. Paul terms it, is hereby killed by them. That this ministry of condemnation, which terrified the Jews, when delivered from Mount Sinai, is now between the hammer and the anvil at the preacher's forge, as it were, ready to be hammered out into pure Gospel. It also represents the labour and pains it costs these ministers to get out the mystical meaning of this book, and set it before their hearers. But I would caution you against crediting the com-
mon

mon report which says they receive a gratuity from the printers, bookfellers and bookbinders, in consideration of such indefatigable labours ; as it does not come well attested. Slander originates from a malevolent heart, and seldom fails to attack even the most unblemished characters. But I hope to send you nothing but what shall be attended with sufficient proofs, and founded on undeniable facts.

2. On banging the cushion. A cushion with them seems to be an emblem of carnal ease ; banging it therefore most naturally expresses self-denial. It also is so easy a thing, that the least reclining upon it may literally prove a temptation to sleeping : but when kept in perpetual play under the powerful blows of the preacher, it strikingly sets forth the insufficiency of all worldly gratifications, the uncertainty of all carnal ease, and the fluctuation of all terrestrial grandeur. Also the deep effects the preacher's fists have upon the cushion, may represent unto us the wholesome operations of his doctrine on the hearts of his hearers : for these preachers do not always chuse verbally to inform the people what good they do, but wisely let actions speak for them. Therefore by their indignation against the cushion they testify unto us their abhorrence of the praise of men, and of all sensual indulgences ; and evince their readiness to take up the cross themselves first, and to step before their flock into the waters of tribulation : for example is su-

perior to precept. Moreover, the cushion may serve to represent unto us the sleep of sin, or carnal security ; and beating it heartily, may prove a lively picture, of the manner in which a careless unbelieving sinner, must be roused up and not spared, 'till he feels the power of the ministry, and acknowledges the prevailing influence of such *rhetoric*. But lastly, should any dust happen to arise from the cushion while under these operations, as in some places is the case (when it eludes the fidelity and escapes the diligence of the duster) the orator's fists bring it to light ; to represent unto us his intentional fidelity, and that no secret corruption of the heart shall, as far as he can, remain unreprieved by his heart-searching sermon. And also by the dust flying about the place, the audience learn a humbling lesson, being instructively reminded that they are made of dust, and must shortly return unto it ; or, according to Isaiah's words, that they are " counted as the small dust of the " balance." But when the minister happens to rap his knuckles against any hard part of the pulpit, it represents his word rebounding from stony impenitent hearts, where it could make no impression ; and the pain this blow seems to occasion, represents the aching of his heart for those who reject his message. Thus far on the utility and edification of beating the Bible and the pulpit-cushion.

3. Now we are called to consider the *rodomontade* and *vociferation*, which accompany their public

public instructions. But I know not what reason they can have for using so much clamor in delivering their divinity, unless they design it to represent the spiritual deafness and *stupidity* of their auditories, and their amazing distance from devotion ; and that by the *stretch* of their own voice they are to be *quickened*. By the bye, learn we here, that a Methodist parson is not worth a fiddle-stick unless nature has framed his lungs fit for bawling, roaring, hooping, and screaming. —But all this noisy preaching, as they assure us, necessarily proceeds from true zeal for the good of the church ; and all faithful ministers must do it, because, say they, the scripture commands them to do it ; see Isa. lviii. 1. and Ezek. vi. 11. The former of these prophets was commanded to “cry aloud,” &c. The latter, to “smite with his hand, and stamp with his foot.” Now, in my opinion, this was a manner of prophesying, or preaching, peculiar to the dispensation under which those prophets lived, and we no where find it was adopted into the New Testament. This makes me conclude that our *modern prophets* have taken the liberty to borrow this commission from Isaiah and Ezekiel without their leave ; but cannot possibly believe it ever was designed for them ; and my reason for it is this : The ministers of the New Testament are not required to adopt the manner of Jewish prophets, by reason of the vast difference between their respective dispensations : And again, would these ministers prove the con-

trary, they must prove that the Lord commands all the ministers of the Gospel to "go down into "the potter's house;" for this was literally a part of Jeremiah's commission, Chap. xviii. But I think no clergyman now has any New Testament permission to borrow it; for altho' "what-
 "ever was written aforetime, was written for
 "our instruction," yet not *all* for our *imitation*, for this would be to return into judaism at once. Many particulars in the prophets' commission were doubtless to terminate either with their lives, or dispensation. And now we have a more excellent ministry, established upon better promises. Heb. viii. 6. But the undiscerning many, as *Pomfret* calls the rabble, may perhaps be easily *converted* to believe that *instruction* and *imitation* are synonymous here; just as easily as they are made to believe the phrases *new creature* and *new birth* are not to be understood *figuratively*. Figures and distinctions being rather above them, their minds are prepared for the *consolation* of laying aside all these "unnecessary, letter-learned, "figures; and understand the whole (in a *lump*) "spiritually or mystically."

Here we may observe how these *charming* vociferations gain the attention, and steal into the hearts of those people of delicacy and discernment, who are wont, on other occasions, to demonstrate the fervor of their hearts in melodious *buzzas*, and *W—s* and liberty for ever! These call them moving and powerful discourses; and I cannot for once but coincide with them in this notion;
 moving

moving and powerful they must be indeed, while attended with all the exterior certain signs of motion and power before mentioned.—Tho' such a ministry is * *vox prætereaque nihil* in the opinion of many persons of undoubted piety, candor, and judgment ; nevertheless it works *wonders* on the minds of some, for it makes them believe it is the great power of God. Than such a belief, nothing can be a stronger instance of gross delusion. Why may not a variety of sounds and gestures operate *mechanically* on the passions, and produce different effects on the mind according to the *humor* the preacher is in ; causing the audience sometimes to *smile*, and sometimes to *weep* ? You need not but view a field-preacher's audience for a proof of this. But why all this should be owing to *supernatural agency*, or the power of God, as they call it, no one can tell, as the Scripture is silent here, and all Philosophy, I apprehend, quite mute. But Horace could well account for it, *Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi*. It must therefore be Mrs. *Fancy* that styles these *wonderful* effects the Power of God. But for my own part, firmly believing I have both scripture and reason on my side, I am fully persuaded that the spirit, voice, and gestures of man can easily produce these *wonders* ; and that it is shockingly unscriptural to ascribe them to the Divine Spirit ; because the like effects are often seen at tragedies, comedies, and morris-

* Nothing but noise

dances ; and because the *small still voice* of the gospel of peace, infinitely differs from this power ; as every unprejudiced christian, acquainted with his Bible, well knows. But tell these sober truths to raving Methodists, and you will *politely* have for answer that you are a profane person, a blasphemer against the Holy Ghost, &c. *understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.* I once happened, as I was going by, to join a methodist auditory, where I heard many *powerful* and *wonderful* things indeed. The agonizing holderforth roared out that man had neither will nor power to repent ; but if they would not *turn*, every drop of sweat he sweated that time (and I thought they were many) would rise against them in judgment. Such a *powerful* and *wonderful* saying spread a gloom and dejection over all faces ; and if one might form an idea of their hearts by their looks, they certainly believed and feared the appearance of their *guide*, in a bath of sweat, against them in judgment. But in this, with all the rest, we can only say, *Si populus vult decipi decipiatur.*

4. Let us now consider the last grand peculiarity proposed ; which is, their vehement railing against the regular clergy. This part of our subject, I fear, is not capable of so much religious improvement and instruction as the preceding ; unless they can prove that *Satan* will cast out *Satan*. This peculiarity in their procedure, is so deeply interwoven with the ground-work of most of their discourses, that I have been frequently at
a loss

a loss to distinguish when they preached justification by faith producing works of charity ; and when, by *the faith* producing works of censure and detraction. They talk of charity 'tis true, but it is evident the regular clergy are not to share in it—This spirit of censure inspires them with liberty of imposing on that respectable order, several significant but obnoxious names ; such as *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, Prophets of *Baal*, Priests of *Mammon*, and the like. The clergy (I wish them joy) when dignified with these titles, may expect to hear a long detail of the privileges belonging to such characters. To drop the figure : No woe can be ransacked from all the Bible, but will be fulminated about their ears. For this they borrow the authority of Christ, alledging that as he denounced the like woes against the ancient Pharisees, the same are applicable to the modern ones. But here they greatly err, not knowing the scriptures, nor who are Pharisees. The divinely omniscient Jesus saw infallibly into the hearts of all men at once. And St. Paul and St. Peter, in the case of Elymas and Ananias, evidenced a miraculous penetration, received from him in order to inspect the state of their souls ; and of course had authority to address them by names suitable thereto. Thus, the first planters of christianity, were enlightened and empowered from above at particular times, to inspect the hearts of some particular impostors, in order to expose their impostures to the world, and evince the truth of christianity. Therefore St. Paul
could

could not mistake the case of Elymas, nor wrong him in calling him a child of the Devil. But none of this authority from above, no miraculous inspection of the human breast, have these gentlemen of whom I speak. Nay I have heard some of them (I suppose *unguardedly*) declare, that "the human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and therefore know but very little of their own:" What improper persons must they be therefore to judge of the case of others ! And what arrogance and presumption must it be in them to bellow out against the clergy, "*Scribes, Pharisees !*" &c. Here they apply to themselves, sometimes, that scripture (1 John ii. 20) "Ye have an unction from the Holy One; and ye know all things." Which the Apostle applied to the days of miracles. And tho' with affected modesty they will tell you they know but little of their own hearts, yet they will give you to understand that they, by the help of this *unction*, can pry into yours pretty deeply; and if you dare to differ from them, will venture to give you some pretty title or another, such as a *Formalist*, or a *Pharisee*; if not a *Hypocrite*. O pride and presumption, how long will ye be suffered to stalk in the church !

Moreover, they compass sea and land making profelytes, and then demand of us, "What miracles would you have ? Here are drunkards made sober !" &c. These *conversions*, they insinuate, are petty miracles; but unhappily they,

they, in general, if not always, prove conversions from drunkenness to covetousness, or from excess of apparel to flandering and backbiting, &c. Nor does the "broad seal of heaven," as they call it, appear here.

Having shewn you how their pretended commission to censure the clergy, resolves itself into the height of self-conceit and arrogancy; you are now to consider the advantages they avail themselves of by it. When the regular clergy are depicted as a race of men ascended from Pluto's regions, must not they then serve as a foil to set forth itinerants as angels of light? When their morals are traduced, and their doctrines misrepresented, what is it but to cry out, 'Quit your church; follow us; and if you bestow on *the cause* "nothing else, at all events let us have the benefit "of your *breath!*" When their own labours in the vineyard, with all their exaggerating circumstances, are *humbly* recounted, and *self-denyingly* set before the public congregation, the regular clergy of course must appear a set of "idle drones, "caring for nothing but the fleece of the flock." And I apprehend they deem it necessary, the true sons of our excellent church should be thus characterised, before the purposes of schism and party-zeal can possibly be answered.

Permit me here to make a short digression, in order to transmit to you some account of one Mr. *W. Proteus*, the declaimer, (as he is called by many

many of his own party) : I mention him because he is peculiarly fond of the phrases *idle drones*, and *caring for the fleece of the flock*. He was born, as I have been told, in Warwickshire, and baptized in his infancy into the communion of the Church of England ; and bred up to trade. But during his apprenticeship he felt an *impulse* which told him he ought to be rebaptized by the Anabaptists ; and so it came to pass. But proving himself such an insufferable incendiary among those people, he soon ran himself on *dry ground*, and intirely lost the benefit of his *second* baptism. Now another *impulse* whispered him that a matriculation at Oxford, would answer him a far better purpose than his last baptism did ; he therefore avowedly renounced it, and claimed the benefit of the *first*, (which it seems was not annulled,) in order to be a Clergyman. Now at Oxford he soon gave them a specimen of his *amazing genius* by *lecturing* the bed-maker, &c. But the candor of *Alma Mater* excusing (on his father's account, who is certainly a worthy man) his well-known deficiencies in other respects, gave him a lift into Holy Orders. Then immediately, in testimony of his gratitude to her, he commenced an *itinerant*. Now his *lay* brethren in the ministry soon reaped the same *smarting* benefit from his lecturing genius, with his *happy* attendants at Oxford ; making one *squeak* here and another *quake* there—Having wrought some *wonders* of this sort in England, he crossed the Atlantic, “ full fraught with “ zeal ” (as I have read) at the head of a few *lay ministers* ;

ministers; but his banner soon proving too hot for them, they *mutinied*. Now he had no resource but black detraction; he traduced them there, and calumniated them to his correspondents in England. This having stamped disgrace upon him among all friends of humanity; and with other things, too disagreeable and tedious to be mentioned, impeding his fondly expected success in his itinerancy; an *impulse* told him, that as *Haman* was honoured by *Abasuerus* on account of his coincidence with his measures, he might also in like manner acquire some degree of honor in coinciding with the *Congress*. And having no other way now left to procure applause, he declared himself a *Patriot* (for he laid no claim to that character before). *Inspired* with patriotic fire, he prayed with "amazing energy," that sure success would ever attend the congressional arms, and that "the counsels of our *Ahitophel* ministry" might be overturned for ever. This I am at full liberty to tell you, because I was enjoined no sort of secrecy when an intimate acquaintance of his told me this, and that an account of his energetic prayers was published in the American Newspapers. His friends have lately had some prognostications of his purposing to return soon to England. Now let me *for once* foretell a future event. Think you that Mr. *Proteus*, if he comes, will not, now and then, pray for King GEORGE, that the Lord would "strengthen him that he "may vanquish and overcome all his enemies," *Congress* and all——?

Thus

Thus various are the metamorphoses or *regenerations* Mr. *Proteus* has passed through. And both he and his violent partisans tell us "they are all the broad seals of heaven": but,

—*credat Judæus apella,*
Non ego—

But, for my own part, I doubt not, if he comes, but he will convince all his inferior itinerants, (for *inferiors* of that sort he must find, or he cannot live,) of the truth of the adage, *cælum, non animum, mutant, qui trans mare currunt*. I assure you, this is a faithful and a candid specimen of his spirit and conduct; which, together with abundance more of the like complexion, their procedure would furnish me with, gives us a convincing idea of the *charitable* treatment the regular Clergy might expect from such *ambitious, veering* zealots, did but the reins of power permit their fully exercising the *persecuting* lash. But in justice to Mr. *Proteus*, I must dismiss this digression with observing, that he has been hitherto a stanch enemy to the *minister-making*, now in vogue among the mongrel Methodists, calling themselves *Independants*. A striking instance of his abhorrence of it, he once gave to his brother-in-law; who (though a good man in other respects) unhappily took it into his head to adopt methodistical *Independency*; and consequently got a sham title, and was speedily *ordered* a Presbyter of that name. But his brother *Proteus* no sooner knew it,

it, than he was highly incensed at the reproach this new-fangled mode of ordination would inevitably bring on their family. Therefore forgetting his *second* baptism, speedily went to him at his own house, and (as I have been credibly informed) held his fist to his teeth, while he *powerfully and energetically* lectured him with his tongue, for such an insufferable piece of religious folly—

Thus, we see, these people are exceedingly angry in carrying on their cause : and an angry cause they make it appear to be, when its defence requires the weapons of invective, raillery, and burlesque. But methinks I hear you ask me ; “ Pray, Sir, is a preacher never to be allowed the “ use of an *irony* ? ” Yes, my good friend : But a preacher is never to *revile* : Inspiration hath used ironies, but inspiration hath said, “ He that uttereth a SLANDER is a fool.” But these reviling, recriminating gentlemen, under pretence of using *mild ironies*, in reality charge their artillery so abundantly with *banters, sneers, sarcasms*, and bungling *burlesques*, that the explosion thereof would raise in you a thousand wonders, that both clergy and laity are not, by such dreadful fires, totally vanquished, and the field long ago cleared of them all. Hence it is evident heaven does not own their arms ; they bear not her stamp. In Holy Writ we read of an Angel contending with the Devil about the body of Moses, and “ durst not bring against him a *railing* accusation.” We read also an excellent passage in a pamphlet entitled

entitled FRIENDLY REMARKS, &c. (p. 8.) which I think very apposite to our purpose. "I know (says that author) there is no *argument* in *banter*, nor *conclusion* in *sarcastm*, nor *divinity* in a *sneer*: such weapons I wish totally to discard; they are *pitiful* even for the world, but they are *scandalous* when used by a Christian." *
No;

——*Non defensoribus istis*
Tempus eget——

To this passage, methinks, I hear my friend heartily say *Amen*. Such weapons are scandalous indeed, more especially when turned against that sacred Order of men, the regular clergy. For, if there be some among them (as there may be of the younger sort) whose failings and imperfections expose them somewhat to the ridicule of Infidels; yet they must be a strange set of Christians, who forget *themselves* so far as not to know how to make allowance for them. But to oppose them as if they were Heretics, and reproach them as if they were Devils; and on account of a few careless members, to reflect on the whole body indiscriminately, at once betrays amazing illiberality, rancor, and devilism. And a circumstance which considerably swells the magnitude of this evil, is, that these calumniators of the clergy, have it *no way* in their power to reform them, or do them any good temporal or spiritual. Nevertheless, they scruple not to reproach them for

* Compared with Luke xix. 22. former part.

the *supposed* want of what they cannot confer on their own hearts, nor have to bestow upon them. And however sorry I may be to say it, this, as thousands know, is the case. And by means of our burlesquing itinerants, numbers of the baser sort conceive deep prejudices against the Church, her true ministers, and ministry. And, as in the last century, *Fanatics* taught the rabble to cry "No Bishops!" And "bind our Kings with chains, and our Nobles with links of iron!" So now, by these means, they acquire a knack in casting in the clergy's teeth, "Physician heal thyself." And to account for this further, take an instructive passage out of GOLIATH SLAIN, p. 175. "It is no difficult thing (says that author) to call things by wrong names, and to make the *herd* of mankind to believe that these are their true names." Excellently well said! Hence we clearly see, how this *herd* are taught the *charitable* art to conceive of the Church Ministers as *monsters of iniquity, dumb dogs, Scribes and Pharisees, Jews and Heathens*——

Thus I have unreservedly opened my bosom, and conscientiously and impartially written to you my *Naked Thoughts* on this subject. If providence afford me health and opportunity, I shall in a future letter or two to you, point out the important obligation of subscription, and shew how the field-preaching clergy (as such) inevitably violate their subscriptions both of the articles and the *canons*, as well as all the oaths and solemn promises

promises of *regularity* and *conformity*, they have made at their ordinations ; and then refute their pleas for their present mode of nonconformity and defiance of church-government.

I am, DEAR SIR,

Your most obliged Servant, &c.

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